

Riviera was one of first area supper clubs

When the Prohibition speakeasy evolved into the supper club of the 1930s, it elevated an evening out into one of fine dining and ushered in the golden age of the cocktail.

In Green Bay, the popularity of supper clubs grew for more than two decades, reaching a height in the 1950s. It was a time of piano bars, sing-a-longs, a two-hour wait for dinner and staying until 1 a.m. closing. It was a time of "dressing up" in suits and ties, cocktail dresses and heels. It was a time of George Halas and his Chicago Bears coaches holding court at The Stratosphere on Saturday night before they played the Packers.

Among the more popular places to go for a "night on the town" were Pat Golden's, Hazel's, Mae Dury's, Manci's, Wally's Spot, Town & Country, The Zuider Zee.

But The Riviera Club was one of the first.

In 1928, the Fox River Valley Country Club was sold to Reeves and Harris, architects of the Chicago Landscape Co. They turned it into a public fee course and changed its name to the Green Bay Golf Course — later the Town and Country Golf Course.

They converted the former clubhouse into a nightclub. Located between the Fox River and northwest side of Vista Road in Allouez, it was named the Clava Del Rio (Key to the River). By 1934, the nightclub featured dance bands and vaudeville shows. There was no cover charge.

In July 1934, Pat Selissen leased the building from Reeves and Harris, made considerable improvements and changed the name to The Riviera Club. The nightclub was one of the most elaborate in Northeastern Wisconsin.

On June 10, 1935, a fire destroyed the Riviera. Pat Selissen and his wife Florence, who had living quarters on the second floor, were visiting friends in



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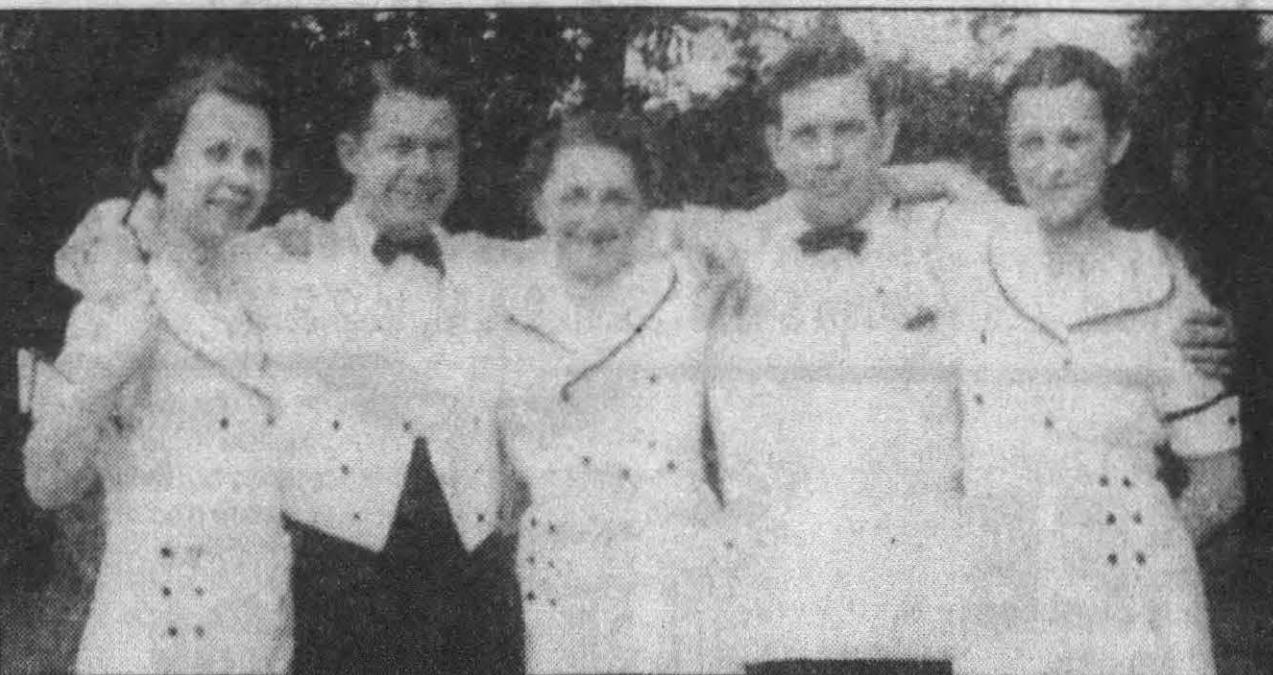


Shawano. Children were seen the next morning trying to break open slot machines in which nickels had melted into a solid mass.

Shortly after the fire, Pat Selissen purchased the summer home and seven acres of land from the late Dr. Robert E. Minahan's estate on Nicolet Drive for \$32,000.

He renovated the home into a supper club. The new Riviera, which had a porch that overlooked the bay, opened for business in July 1936 and became a popular spot for lunch as well as dinner.

Pat Selissen employed his brothers, Joe and Linus (Dick) Selissen. Pat's wife Florence and Joe's wife Eleanor were waitresses. A third waitress was Rose Coppens. Pat Selissen died in the



Photos courtesy Brown County Historical Society



1940s and his crew went to other jobs.

Rose Coppens and her husband Hank opened The Stratosphere Supper Club in 1950.

In 1952, Joe and Eleanor Selissen purchased the Riviera Supper Club from an interim owner. It was advertised as an "Old Favorite" with a new boss. The menu offered fresh Maine lobster dinner for \$3.50, T-Bone steak for \$3.50 and shrimp for \$2.

In 1957 Linus (Dick) Selissen and Marge Selissen opened the Sky Top Supper Club. Their speciality: steaks served on sizzle platters.

At the Riviera: In the 1930s, The Riviera Club, photo at left, was one of the more popular supper clubs in Green Bay.

Some of those who worked at the Riviera during that time are shown above. From left, are, Florence Selissen, waitress; Linus Selissen, bartender; Elanore Selissen, waitress; Pat Selissen, owner; and Rose Coppens, waitress.

In 1969 Joe Selissen sold the Riviera Supper Club property to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

In the early 1970s, the land was developed into Communiversity Park. All that remains of the original site are the stone hedges and the Selissens' Riviera mailbox, which Joe gave to his niece Judy (Selissen) Krawczyk. It now stands on the side of the road of the Sky Top Supper Club, carrying on the family hospitality tradition.

Submitted by Carol Jones, Brown County Historical Society.